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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE**  
**Newport, RI**

**Africa Command: Building a Foundation of Operational Interagency  
Cooperation**

By

**Chad E. Piacenti**  
**LCDR, US Navy**

A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

**Signature: Chad E. Piacenti 10 May 2007**

## **Abstract**

### *Africa Command: Building a Foundation of Operational Interagency Cooperation*

Interagency cooperation has been a recognized deficiency for many years. The National Security Act of 1947 and the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 helped to streamline military operations and chains of command; however reform is still needed to affect similar change across the breadth of the Executive Branch. While this national debate is beyond the operational commander's ability to control, it often falls to regional combatant commanders, with the bulk of resources and personnel, to execute national policy decisions and integrate that execution with other Federal agencies. This paper defines the current policy decision-making process at the national level and identifies the deficiencies in translating those decisions into operational action. It identifies Africa Command as a unique chance to improve interagency coordination at the operational level and recommends tasks, specifically command structure, leveraging expertise, and capturing best practices, that AFRICOM needs to accomplish in order to improve interagency coordination. The paper also identifies challenges to operational interagency coordination, specifically cultural, budgetary and authoritative. Finally, the paper draws conclusions on the importance of effective interagency coordination for the future of operations in Africa as well as on a global scale.

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## **Introduction and Thesis**

***“Improving the capacity of agencies to plan, prepare, coordinate, integrate and execute responses covering the full range of crisis contingencies and long-term challenges is a top priority. We need to strengthen the capacity of departments and agencies to do comprehensive, results-oriented planning.” - National Security Strategy, March 2006<sup>1</sup>***

The National Security Strategy identifies a priority that has been a recognized concern for decades. Legislation ranging from the National Security Act of 1947 to the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 has attempted to streamline the ability to apply national power, specifically military power, in an efficient and effective way. Nevertheless, the problem of effectively integrating and efficiently applying all aspects of national power continues to exist at all levels of action: strategic, operational and tactical. Volumes of studies and research continually underline the need for legislative reform that improves the government’s ability to operate (rather than simply coordinate) across departmental boundaries in order to more effectively respond to crisis and, more importantly, to establish long term conditions to prevent future crises from occurring.

While legislative reform is beyond the scope of responsibility for an operational commander, it has significant impact on his ability to effectively execute national policy decisions, particularly in coordination with other governmental and non-governmental agencies. Much of the current debate about how to improve interagency cooperation and coordination focuses on the national level where legislation is enacted and policy is formed. However, policy decisions made at the national level must often be executed at the operational level, requiring the operational commander to have the resources and procedures to implement national decisions.

The creation of Joint Interagency Working Groups (JIACGs) and other interagency organizations at the theater level have improved the ability to effectively integrate all aspects of national power in the pursuit of national objectives, however much remains to be done in order to truly accomplish national ends through operational ways and means. Current legislation, policy and organizational structure at the national level have improved in recent years and support more effective formulation of national policies that incorporate a greater spectrum of concerns across Executive Branch departmental boundaries. It is the manner of execution of that policy at the operational level that requires some critical consideration and is of most use to the operational commander.

Interagency coordination at the operational level, while improved since the creation of JIACGs at theater commands, remains focused on crisis response and is at its core what the name implies, “coordination”. *For interagency operations to be truly effective in executing national policy at the operational level, interagency structure, culture and doctrine must evolve.* An evolution much like the Department of Defense (DoD) has experienced over the last 20 years: from joint coordination to joint inter-operability to an ultimate goal of joint inter-dependence.

*The impending stand-up of U.S. Africa Command<sup>2</sup> provides a unique and critical opportunity to break the pattern of operational interagency coordination as primarily a crisis response function, and create a new, theater-level, integrated interagency structure designed to efficiently implement all aspects of national power in a sustained, long-term way.* Current national policy towards Africa and the strain of DoD resources fighting two regional conflicts make Africa Command a perfect construct to not only provide sustained shaping actions on the continent to improve its long-term stability, but also provide a chance

to develop new frameworks, doctrine and experience that could form a baseline model for operational interagency action worldwide.

In order to demonstrate the necessity for interagency reform at the operational level and how Africa Command could be used as a tool to make that happen requires an understanding of three distinct areas: *1. Identify the bounds of the problem, specifically how national level, inter-agency decision making influences actions at the operational level. 2. Identify the opportunities that Africa Command offers to both increased interagency coordination on the continent and what structures and organizations may be leveraged to build a model for future success on a global scale. 3. Identify the challenges and pitfalls to improving interagency operations and how they can be mitigated.*

### **Defining the Problem: From National Policy to Operational Execution**

Since the passage of the National Security Act of 1947, the National Security Council (NSC) has been the President's principal forum for considering national security and foreign policy matters with his senior national security advisors and cabinet officials. The National Security Act of 1947 directs that the function of the NSC "shall be to advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies related to the national security so as to enable the military services and the other departments and agencies of the government to cooperate more effectively in matters involving the national security."<sup>3</sup> While this "cooperation" has at many times been contentious, the creation of the NSC has ensured that national policy is developed with the awareness and input of various departments of the U.S. Executive Branch.

The nature and organization of the NSC has changed significantly since its inception. The events of September 11, 2001 in particular, forced the current administration to take a closer look at how the Executive Branch organizes itself to carry out the direction of the President. In February, 2001, National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) One outlined the current administration's structure for the NSC.<sup>4</sup> This structure includes a Principals Committee, meeting once or twice a week to review pressing policy issues, a Deputies Committee meeting four to five times a week, which conducts the majority of the day-to-day policy decision-making, and various Policy Coordination Committees (PCC) that deal with a range of national security issues that impact the responsibilities of several Executive Branch departments and agencies.<sup>5</sup> To a military mind, these different levels of action within the NSC can almost be viewed as strategic, operational and tactical levels of war, with each committee operating at a different level of fidelity. However, directive authority within each group to order action on the part of other departments or agencies is certainly limited. As Alan Whittaker pointed out in a 2004 National Defense University research report on the NSC, "An effective interagency process reduces the complexity of policy decisions and focuses the planning on mission success factors. Collaboration is central to a committee's success, but teamwork and unity is vulnerable to political risks, bureaucratic equities, and personal relationships."<sup>6</sup> The lack of a military-style hierarchy within the NSC that places directive authority within a chain of command to streamline the decision-making process is, at first glance, frustrating. It would seem that a structure that is essential to military operations could be applied to the senior-most policymaking body in the nation. Former Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, GEN Colin Powell, points out the advantages however, to having an NSC without a rigid command structure. "There



should be tension within the national security team, and from that tension, arguments are surfaced for the President.....the one who makes the foreign policy decisions for the United States of America, is the President.”<sup>7</sup>

This tension has clear advantages at the national decision making level in providing multiple points of view, political considerations, and dissenting opinions to the President so that he can make informed policy decisions. There is a significant disadvantage here as well though. Lack of clearly delineated authority within the lower echelons of the NSC may support better policy debate, but it also hampers effective execution of that policy once a decision has been made. This is a weakness that has long been identified. Several recent studies have examined this weakness and offer potential solutions, such as a new “Goldwater-Nichols” to lay down a structure for inter-agency operations much as the original did for military operations.<sup>8</sup> Some action has even been taken. In December of 2005, NSPD-44 was issued, recognizing the need to effectively manage interagency efforts to support reconstruction and stabilization. The directive identified the Secretary of State, represented by the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), as the lead agent in coordinating relevant government agencies in the preparation for, planning, and conduct of reconstruction and stabilization operations.<sup>9</sup> The directive also identified the responsibilities of other Executive Branch departments in supporting S/CRS in the execution of reconstruction and stabilization operations.

NSPD-44 highlights the national level concern of how important effective interagency cooperation is to the execution of foreign policy objectives. The directive also highlights the administration’s concern over the role failed (and failing) states play in the security of the United States. That being said, how far does NSPD-44 go in rectifying the underlying

problem of effectively and efficiently executing interagency operations? While this is a step in the right direction, it is focused on a narrow slice of U.S. government operations and does not address the deeper issue of providing directive authority to organize and execute a response across departmental boundaries.

A recent study on U.S. Government and Defense reform conducted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) identified a simple truth, “Interagency operations are no longer rare. Yet crises are still managed largely on a case by case basis, with interagency coordination mechanisms reinvented each time. While such ad hoc processes are agile, they are neither coherent nor durable.”<sup>10</sup> It logically follows from this statement that national policy decisions that are not made in a crisis and surrounded by an ad hoc interagency structure to execute them (such as relief operations in the wake of Hurricane Katrina) are left up to the individual Executive Branch departments to execute once they leave the NSC. This stove-piped style of execution will naturally be subject to the cultural, political, and budgetary constraints of individual agencies, further diminishing the possibility of a unified government effort. This disconnect directly concerns the operational commander, as he usually has the preponderance of forces and resources where action is taking place and is left with the unenviable task of attempting to support multiple agency efforts that may well be working at cross purposes in the pursuit of the same goal.

Understanding the difficulty of translating national policy into coordinated national action, particularly at the operational level, the DoD has implemented some potential solutions at the combatant command level. The most apparent of these is the creation of JIACGs at all the regional combatant commands. Joint Forces Command defines the JIACG role as, “coordinating operational planning in a contingency operation with civilian agencies

in the U.S. government, supporting day-to-day planning at the combatant commander headquarters, advising planners regarding civilian agency operations, capabilities, and limitations and providing perspective in the coordinated use of national power.”<sup>11</sup>

This construct has gone a long way to streamlining interagency efforts at the operational level and ensuring unity of effort between the activities of the DoD and Department of State (DoS) within regions, but remains limited in some significant ways. COL Matthew Bogdanos, in an initial review of JIACG performance noted, “a major challenge facing JIACGs today is the lack of a single, national level organization issuing guidance, managing competing agency policies, and directing agency participation in JIACGs. In short the NSC expects unity of effort without unity of command.”<sup>12</sup> Without a directive authority at the national level, JIACGs are not uniform across combatant commands in structure or purpose. It could be argued that they shouldn’t be, considering each theater faces separate and distinct challenges that require unique interagency solutions. Nonetheless, without an agreed upon doctrine, organization or directive authority, JIACGs will continue to have difficulty moving from a coordinating and deconfliction body to a true organization that fuses all aspects of national power into unified effort at the operational level.

Many of the issues facing interagency cooperation at the national and operational level are ones that can not be solved by an operational commander and in some cases will require legislative action to overcome. However, this does not mean that there is nothing an operational commander can do to streamline interagency operations in his theater, and even be a driver for change at the national level. The creation of Africa Command presents a unique opportunity to do just that.

## **Africa Command: Opportunities for Increased Interagency Cooperation**

*“The complexity of future operations requires that, in addition to operating jointly, our forces have the capability to participate effectively as one element of a unified national effort. This integrated approach brings to bear all the tools of statecraft to achieve our national objectives unilaterally when necessary, while making optimum use of the skills and resources provided by multinational military forces, regional and international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and private voluntary organizations when possible.” – Joint Vision 2020<sup>13</sup>*

It has been public knowledge for some months that Africa Command (AFRICOM) will become a reality and draw into its area of responsibility regions from three separate regional commanders and all of the disparate military, political, and humanitarian concerns of an entire continent. In 2006, Africa was identified as a high priority in the national security strategy noting its cultural, commercial and historic linkages to the United States.<sup>14</sup> While the ultimate structure of the command remains a matter of deliberation, there are several indications that it will not resemble the regional commands the DoD is familiar with, but will rather have a distinctly interagency flavor in its composition.<sup>15</sup> Considering the identified need for and shortfall in interagency cooperation, the creation of this command represents some significant opportunities for an operational commander to not only promote long term stability in the region, but also develop lessons and experience that can form the basis for operational interagency cooperation on a global scale.

There are three distinct tasks for AFRICOM to accomplish in order to take full advantage of the opportunity to improve the long-term stability of Africa in support of our national security objectives as well as increase the proficiency of U.S. leadership in applying all aspects of national power. First, the AFRICOM command structure needs to incorporate an interagency *decision-making* body with more authority and permanence than the traditional JIACGs that exist today. Second, AFRICOM leadership needs to broker the significant

experience of the U.S Coast Guard in bridging the gap between military and non-military operations as well as intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that have been operating on the continent for decades. Third, AFRICOM needs to capture, evaluate and disseminate its best practices in order to form the foundation for an interagency doctrine that can be applied on a wider scale.

***1. Improved interagency planning and decision-making ability.*** Research clearly shows that interagency decision making, or even just coordination, while improving, still has a long ways to go to achieve true unity of effort. The CSIS report on U.S. Government and Defense reform identified several sources for this deficit. First, unlike the DoD, the U.S. Government lacks established procedures for planning and conducting interagency operations. Second, when an operation is conducted, there is no standard approach to fully integrating the activities of military forces and civilian agencies on the ground. Third, and perhaps most significant, many civilian government agencies simply lack the capacity to rapidly deploy around the globe.<sup>16</sup>

In order for AFRICOM to overcome these challenges, its command structure needs to include representatives from other U.S. government agencies that have the power to speak for their organization and have significant interests in Africa. In particular, representatives from S/CRS, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Department of the Treasury. While members from these organizations shouldn't be viewed as exclusive, what is essential is that those representatives are permanent members of the AFRICOM organization with the authority to direct action within their own agency. This serves a number of purposes. Permanence allows representatives to build relationships with other members of the organization, enhancing unity of effort. It also forces those members to

come to a collective agreement on the scope of any particular problem being faced and arrive at a consensus on a proper solution. Lastly, it forces members to take ownership of the problem as a collective even while viewing it from different agency perspectives.

Ultimately, the command organization should be able to accomplish the steps for effective interagency coordination laid out in JP 3-08 Vol. I: forging a collective definition of the problem, establishing a common frame of reference, capitalizing on experience, establishing responsibility, and directing all means toward unity of effort.<sup>17</sup>

**2. *Broker existing interagency experience.*** While the difficulties and deficiencies of interagency coordination have been highlighted, this does not mean that there isn't any resident expertise on how to conduct effective interagency operations. The DoD itself has significant, long term experience acting within an interagency construct, however those experiences are usually the result of supporting other agencies during crisis rather than long term, sustained interaction. The U.S. Coast Guard on the other hand, is the very definition of interagency expertise. Since its inception, the Coast Guard has operated in both civilian law-enforcement and military roles and is manned with personnel familiar with both cultures. With the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security in 2003, 22 federal agencies merged, including the Coast Guard, dramatically affecting operational level domestic interagency work.<sup>18</sup> This long-standing tradition of working within both the civilian and military realms makes the Coast Guard an ideal organization to bridge the cultural gap between federal agencies and should play a major leadership role in the AFRICOM structure. Considering the need for improved security and stability in Africa, including the ability of nations to patrol their own borders and enforce their own laws, the Coast Guard can provide valuable expertise in this area as well.

While the Coast Guard is a logical choice for leveraging expertise, the experience of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations should not be overlooked. The African Union, International Red Cross, Economic Community of West African States, Doctors without Borders, among others, all hold unique expertise in their areas of interest. While it may not be possible to include some of these organizations as permanent members of AFRICOM, direct and consistent liaison should be a matter of course in order to understand the environment in which AFRICOM is acting as well as potentially coordinate those actions with outside organizations for greater effect. Indeed, many of the federal agencies likely to be represented within AFRICOM will have direct and long-standing relationships with some of these organizations, providing AFRICOM greater opportunity to cooperate with groups that may be sensitive to working directly with the U.S. military.

In the end, the ability of AFRICOM to leverage expertise both from within and without the U.S. government will be critical to its success, considering much of its actions will put the military in a supporting, vice leading, role. A wide array of experience and established relationships will act as a force multiplier in effectively executing national policy on the continent.

***3. Capture today's lessons for tomorrow's doctrine.*** If AFRICOM is successful in creating and implementing an effective interagency structure and can leverage the wide array of existing expertise, it is inevitable that it will develop significant best practices on how to conduct sustained, effective interagency operations. There are several Joint Publications that lay out doctrine on the conduct of interagency cooperation, but much of this DoD-centric doctrine focuses on crisis response rather than sustained action. Considering the lack of a unified, national doctrine defining how sustained interagency operations should be

conducted, AFRICOM must ensure it captures the lessons and best practices of interagency operations. Recent U.S. government experiences with Hurricane Katrina, Tsunami relief in Indonesia, Earthquake relief in Pakistan, and humanitarian disaster in Sudan highlight the importance for rapid, effective interagency action. Increasing public debate on the need for a Goldwater-Nichols Act governing interagency structure indicates increasing national attention on the issue. AFRICOM finds itself at the vanguard. The lessons it learns and best practices it develops may well form the foundation for significant change in how the federal government operates, by influencing legislation and the development of a unified, national doctrine for interagency operations.

### **Africa Command: Challenges to Increased Interagency Cooperation**

*“ The primary challenge of interagency operations is to achieve unity of effort despite the diverse cultures, competing interests, and differing priorities of the participating organizations, many of whom guard their relative independence, freedom of action, and impartiality” – Joint Vision 2020<sup>19</sup>*

While there are significant opportunities for AFRICOM to play a leading role in interagency operations, there remain some significant challenges to success that must be identified and mitigated. The National Security Act of 1947 and the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 both played significant roles in streamlining the U.S. military chain of command and increasing the effectiveness of military operations. While these pieces of legislation broke down barriers, they were really modifying a military culture that already shared similar values, budgets and concepts of authority. Applying that to an interagency construct creates a complex series of challenges that cut across agency and



departmental lines. While the challenges to improving interagency operations are many, chief among them are cultural, budgetary and authoritative.

***1. Breaking down cultural barriers.*** Any organization that is made up of representatives from a variety of groups will inherently have multiple cultures to contend with when trying to come to a consensus. One of the chief difficulties in making Joint Operations work within the military has been the different military cultures of the separate services; each with its own traditions, language and perspectives. Different cultural perspectives can be a significant obstacle to unified action, and is likely to be even more contentious within an interagency group than a comparatively homogenous group of military services.

In addition to the parochial nature of cultural biases, there are also the practical. Different interagency cultures have different ways of looking at and talking about problems. While the DoD lays down doctrine and can be fairly rigid and linear in its problem solving technique, other agencies within the government can have widely varying approaches. Comparing the decision-making of the Department of State and DoD is a good exercise in highlighting these differences. Each department has distinct differences in its tolerance for ambiguity and this is reflected in the way each conducts operations. DoD typically attempts to remove as much ambiguity as possible, applying metrics wherever applicable, while accepting some uncertainty will exist. Essentially, the process is linear and episodic with the end-state being an accepted course of action that is expected to achieve a desired objective.<sup>20</sup> DoS tolerance for ambiguity on the other hand is higher and may deal much more in generalities vice specifics (i.e. “more”

trade, “more” democracy). Its decision-making process is continuous and rarely conclusive.<sup>21</sup>

While these differences at first glance may appear in conflict with each other when trying to develop a unified effort, these differences in cultural outlook can actually be complementary by providing contrasting world views and ultimately a broader range of potential solutions to a problem. In addition, the permanence of representation on an interagency staff and the resulting relationships that develop, act to cross the cultural divides providing individuals from different agencies a greater perspective on how its government partners think and act. This experience pays dividends when that individual returns to his or her own agency and can relate that experience to others.

**2. Crossing budgetary lines.** In many cases the budget of the DoD is exponentially larger than the other agencies it needs to operate with. While the deployment of 200-300 personnel for humanitarian relief somewhere on the planet may not be a significant financial burden on DoD resources, it may be a show stopper for a different agency. Even though, within AFRICOM, DoD is likely to bring the preponderance of resources and personnel, it should not prevent other agencies from taking a leading role when the situation requires.

The ultimate solution to improving the budgetary constraints of non-DoD agencies is not one for the operational commander to solve, nonetheless it is a significant constraint to be aware of when considering interagency solutions to AFRICOM objectives. The CSIS study on government and defense reform recommends a significant increase in funding to organizations like S/CRS and USAID, in order to support expected stabilization and reconstruction activities within organizations will likely have a lead

role.<sup>22</sup> Barring budgetary relief provided by Congress however, AFRICOM leadership should expect that the DoD is likely to bear the brunt of the cost of doing interagency business. Nevertheless, it is a worthwhile price tag if the product is a more effective interagency team that can efficiently implement national policy.

**3. *Determining who's in charge.*** To the military mind, understanding command organizations and command authority is a priority when considering any operation. This can make working within an interagency environment extremely frustrating. Statutory restrictions and cultural differences form distinct barriers against setting up an interagency organization with a military-style chain of command. Considering the primary obstacle is a legal one, it follows that the ultimate solution is a legal one as well. Several studies have already been conducted regarding the need for new legislation that restructures how the federal government operates and coordinates amongst its various agencies. “Goldwater-Nichols II” or “Goldwater-Nichols for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” are terms that are quickly becoming common in national circles.<sup>23</sup> While this is a solution that an operational commander has little control over, the interagency organization of AFRICOM must carefully consider these limitations when developing its command structure. While debate and different points of view are helpful to developing a well thought out plan, execution requires some level of authority and responsibility. The level of permanence of the members of the AFRICOM interagency team should help to mitigate this deficiency to a certain extent, however AFRICOM leadership must ensure members take responsibility and are accountable for their roles in executing agreed upon actions.

## **Conclusion**

The argument for improved interagency cooperation is not a new one. The United States has spent the last five decades finding new ways for different aspects of the Federal government to operate together more effectively. Events around the globe since the end of the Cold War however, have made the need for effective interagency more important than it has ever been. In the last 20 years the United States has responded to countless crises, both natural and man made, expending enormous resources. Some of these crises could have been mitigated or even prevented with the sustained, integrated application of national power over the long term. DoD strategists can call this “shaping” or “presence” but simply put, it is an ounce of prevention instead of a pound of cure.

The creation of AFRICOM has the potential to fundamentally change not only the future of the continent, but how the U.S. government itself does business. An effective interagency team on the continent that draws in the wide array of U.S. government expertise and focuses it on specific national objectives can achieve great things. Drawing in the expertise of international and non-governmental agencies will only serve to expand that potential.

The establishment of this command will not come without challenges, a reality for any organization. Cultural differences, budgetary shortfalls, and chain of command issues in particular can hamper unified effort. For the DoD itself, it has taken over 20 years to break down service barriers and become a truly “joint” force. It is a struggle that continues today. AFRICOM must lead a similar interagency struggle. Its successes will form the foundation for lasting interagency cooperation well into the future.

## Notes

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- <sup>19</sup> Shelton. 18.
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- <sup>22</sup> Murdock. 61-64.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid. 131-138.

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